

Testimony of Ellen Kohler and Matt Cauchy

Shoreline property owners on the East Arm of Grand Traverse Bay in Grand Traverse County
Regarding the DEQ Report on the Impacts of Beach Maintenance and Vegetation Removal

Before The Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs and The House
Committee on Natural Resources, Great Lakes, Land Use and Environment
May 9, 2006

As shoreline property owners on Grand Traverse Bay, we are writing to express our support for allowing the provisions of Part 14 to expire. It is clear from our experience and from the report to the legislature that beach grooming has a negative impact on Michigan's public trust resources.

We have been shoreline property owners for 8 ½ years. We share ownership of a small stretch of shoreline with three other families. When we purchased our house in 1996, the water level was high, coming to the bottom of the small bluff leading from the road to the beach. We were concerned about the potential of such high water levels to erode the base of the bluff. For a variety of reasons, including lower water levels and changing ownership of the houses, the three families left our shoreline in a relatively natural state. Since we moved in, willows and bulrushes have grown in some places below the high water levels of that first year. Their roots began to hold the sand in place. We now have a patchwork of vegetation including small shrubs and grasses that provide protection from the ice flows and wave action throughout the year. It has become our cost-effective, natural seawall.

The young kids of the families that share our beach love to play in willows and grasses that have grown along the shoreline. We see plenty of different species of birds, from bald eagles to kingfishers to waterfowl, and signs of lots of other animals that use or pass through our small stretch of shoreline. The kids find minnows and crayfish each summer. Given our experience, it was no surprise to read in the report that clearing vegetation impacts young fish. When you see these little transparent minnows swimming in the shallow water, it is a marvel that they become perch or walleye or lake trout or bass. It is obvious that they need shelter from the sun and from predators, and that the vegetation provides that shelter.

We understand that as shoreline property owners, we have a special responsibility as stewards of the Great Lakes. While we may have a property interest in some land along the shoreline, we do not own the water. We do not own the fish or the wildlife that depend on the shoreline ecosystems. They are public resources. We know that those of us who are fortunate enough to own Great Lakes shoreline property are very few in comparison to the millions of Michiganders who don't. Yet they love the Great Lakes as much as we do. And they care about the water quality in the lakes, and they care about the wildlife. They have a right to come to Grand Traverse Bay and swim and boat in clean water and fish and enjoy these resources that the state holds in trust for them.

The science tells us that clearing the naturally occurring vegetation along the shoreline will impact water quality and wildlife, valuable public resources. As shoreline property owners, we have to learn to enjoy our beach and the natural vegetation that grows there because that's what is best for the Great Lakes.